

THE DEVIL AND WINNIE FLYNN

“One of the most terrifying reads of the year. It will haunt you long after you’ve finished it.” —**Michael Buckley**, *New York Times* bestselling author of *Undertow*



Written by

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Illustrated by

DAVID OSTOW

THE
DEVIL
AND
WINNIE
FLYNN

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FLYNN

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DAVID OSTOW

**SOHO
TEEN**

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In very loving memory of Marissa Provenza, whose endlessly kind, gentle care of Mazzy made possible the very first words of this book—and so much more. We miss you.

—Micol

For Lily.

—David

DISCLAIMER

The Devil and Winnie Flynn is a work of fiction inspired by the history and lore of the state of New Jersey. As such, while the story incorporates the names of real people, places and events—both historical and contemporary—it places them within a fictional context where historical facts have been manipulated at the authors' discretion for the sake of the story.

Notable among such fictionalizations is the story's inclusion of the name Kallikak. The Kallikak family did in fact exist and their name has relevance within the context of New Jersey history. However, the character of Marie Kallikak is fictitious and her association with the supernatural has no basis in the factual account of the Kallikak family history.

“An unruly demonic darkness, it hangs, waiting for a saving touch.”
—Marissa Provenza, “Legacy of Lunacy”

NOW CASTING—GREATER NJ AREA—*FANTASTIC, FEARSOME NJ*

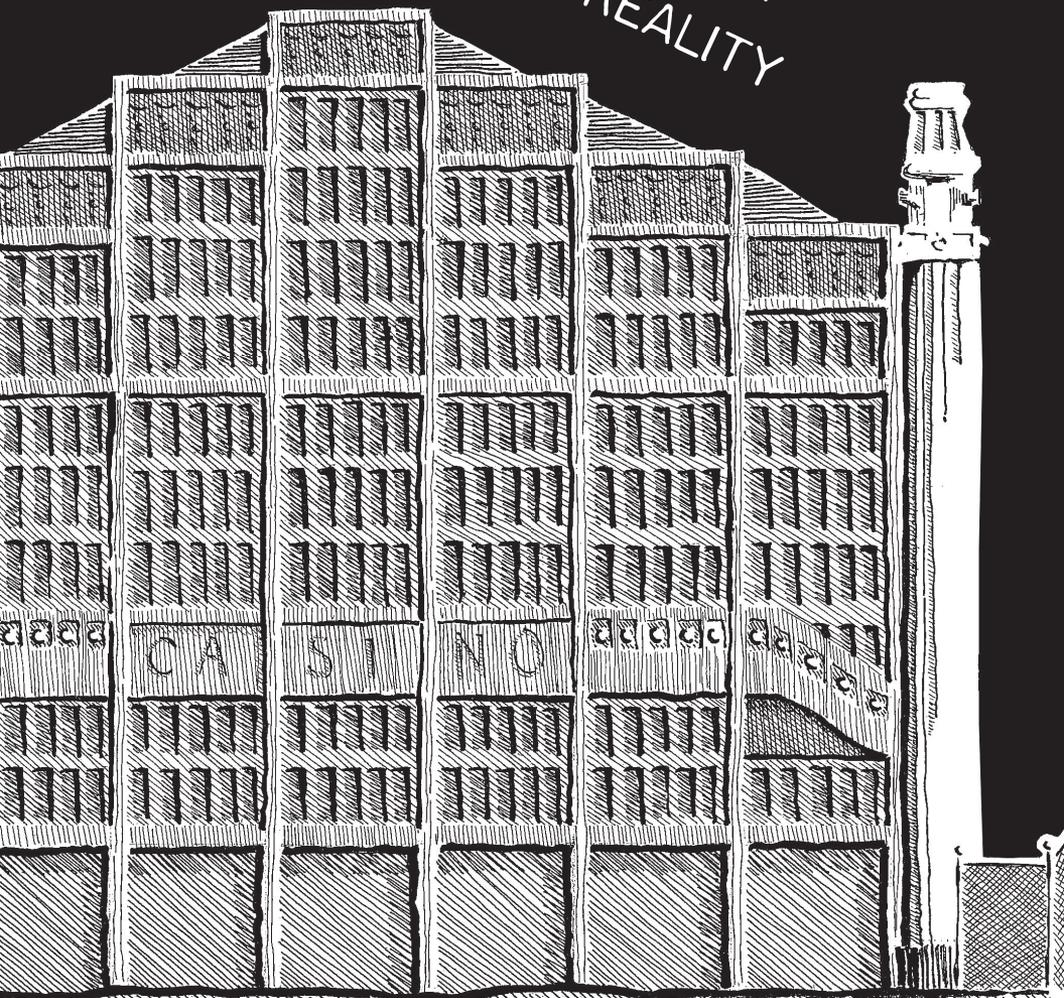
HAVE YOU/HAS SOMEONE YOU KNOW RECENTLY EXPERIENCED PARANORMAL PHENOMENA? ARE YOU A NEW JERSEY NATIVE LIVING IN OR AROUND ASBURY PARK, ESSEX COUNTY/TURTLE BACK ROCK, THE PINE BARRENS, LEEDS POINT, OR TINY TOWN? MAYBE YOU'VE HAD A "FUNNY FEELING" DRIVING PAST THE DEVIL'S TOWER, OR SEEN PHANTOM HEADLIGHTS ALONG CLINTON ROAD? MAYBE YOU'VE EVEN GLIMPSED THE JERSEY DEVIL HIMSELF?

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Part One:
REALITY



Fantastic, Fearsome: NJ
FULL CAST AND CREW LIST

CREATOR/PRODUCER:

Maggie Leader

ASSISTANT DIRECTOR/PRODUCTION MANAGER:

Jane Levin

SCRIPT SUPERVISOR:

Elena Dempsey

DIRECTOR OF PHOTOGRAPHY/LEAD CAMERA:

Russ Wallace

CAMERA ASSISTANT:

Hillary Brandt

[Just wrapped the new Sex Addicts Matchmaker pilot, came recommended from LHR.]

SOUND MIXER:

Wade Clark

GRIP & ELECTRIC:

Lee Joiner and Ernie Tuckerman

[Per Jane: Lee is the redhead!]

PRODUCTION ASSISTANTS:

Winnie Flynn

Amanda Morgan

[peanut allergy. Note to Elena for call sheets re: craft services.]

TALENT (DEVIL HUNTERS):

Seth Jarvis

Casey Whitter

*[*POETRY?]*

Ivan Fell

[under 18; check with Jane on parental waiver!]

ONE



“The devil hunters are here for wardrobe.”

A small, wiry woman with frizzy, loose-cotton hair darts toward me. *Jane*, is what her name is. *Production manager*, which means she’s the boss. Right under Aunt Maggie, anyway, who is basically the boss of this whole weirdo world. Jane is wearing a headset, which should communicate no nonsense, but it’s hard to take hair like that seriously.

It’s hard to take any of this seriously, Lu. Impossible, really. Which is weird, since I’m usually such a serious person.

The Devil Hunters are here for wardrobe.

Hearing that, I expect a pack of goth, *Ghostbuster*-types to stride into our cluster of motel rooms turned makeshift production offices. Powder-white faces, streaky eyeliner, leather, and lace—even in June, in South Jersey—and maybe some backpack-style, strap-on air-ion counter. Something bulky and pseudoscientific, is what I mean, Lu. Something impressive in its commitment to the absurd.

Remember that movie we saw? The one about the ghost hunters, the one that wasn’t *Ghostbusters*? I know you do—with

those self-proclaimed mediums. Their video cameras, and their overinflated egos.

It takes a lot to assume, Lu. That if there *are* spirits, that if the voices of the undead or whoever, that if they really are out there . . . it's a lot to assume that they'd be hanging out just waiting for you, Mr. and Mrs. Very Special Psychic, to come knocking. That kind of thinking takes real *chutzpah*, you know?

But when the lobby door does open, my assumptions vanish in a cough of wet sea-smell laced with the tang of greasy-delicious boardwalk food.

These people actually look kind of normal. Sort of. As normal as a group of "Devil Hunters" can be, anyway.

There are three of them, a little bit older than we are. Two college students with the world's weirdest summer internship, one high schooler with no discernable reason for being here that I can see. Two guys and a girl, and nary an air-ion counter or a trace of eyeliner to be found among them. (Maybe they're in a car trunk somewhere nearby.) Okay, so the girl's hair, chin-length and vivid black, is streaked with bold blue stripes that demand attention.

I take an instant dislike to those bold blue stripes. It isn't nice or particularly open-minded, but I do, Lu. You know I don't trust people who demand attention.

The other two are more low-key. Boy-like with a touch of nerd, in that way: faded T-shirts bearing obscure sci-fi references, frayed cargo shorts. All of those pockets make me wonder again about ghost-hunting equipment: minuscule, feather-light flashlights, recording devices, whatever the paranormal equivalent of mace may be. The shorter and squatter of the two wears flip-flops. This is even less appealing to me than blue-streaked hair, though at least his toenails are

clipped short and reasonably clean. He's the younger one. His hair is an explosion of curls with no place to grow but out. Maybe *that's* why he's here, with this group. Maybe with hair like that, his options were limited.

The taller of the two—the older guy—has his hair tied back in a ponytail, which . . . you know where I stand on that. He looks nice, though—his shoulders strain against his T-shirt in tight little peaks. This endears me for some reason, so I decide to do my best to reserve judgment on his hairstyle.

We'll see. At least this one's hair grows down, anyway.

Ponytail catches me staring, offers an uncertain smile, then flushes and stares at a point on the floor.

"Winnie," Jane says. I'd forgotten she was there. I almost jump. "Can you take the Devil Hunters to wardrobe?"

I would, I really would. Except:

We don't have *wardrobe*.

I've been a production assistant, or PA, at *Fantastic, Fear-some* for a hot minute, but this I know is true. Maybe there's a rolling garment rack in Aunt Maggie's room, the executive suite (which sounds much fancier than it is). But if so, I haven't seen it.

It's reality TV. People wear their real clothes. Right?

"Maggie," Jane clarifies, accurately interpreting my confounded look. "She wants to meet them in person, check out their style before filming starts. We've only seen the audition tapes." (*Wait—was I supposed to watch the audition tapes?*) She throws an approving side-eye at Blue Hair. "She'll like that dye job. Very punk rock."

Maybe in 1992. I think this as loudly as I can, sending it through the psychic space you and I share, Lu. And I think there's a little *ping* where my ribs knit together that tells me

you heard me, you're laughing. Loudly. Even if that's only in my mind, it feels true enough.

But Jane is still waiting on me.

"Right," I say.

Aunt Maggie. My mother's older sister.

We've only just met in person recently, ourselves.

If this were the first act of a horror movie, Maggie would be the boogeyman.

That long-lost relative who steps out of the woodwork after a loved one dies unexpectedly. It barely qualifies as a trope anymore; these days, that's just lazy writing. Second only to the invitation-from-a-reclusive-billionaire-to-spend-a-weekend-in-his-hilltop-mansion premise. So tired. *Don't even do it, kids.* That's what you'd say. *That game never ends well. Ix-nay on the ansion-may.*

But the thing about Maggie is that she's the creator, director, and producer of the *Fantastic, Fearsome US™* series. Eight seasons and counting, syndicated, spin-offs sold to thirteen different countries. She probably sleeps on a bed of solid gold. She knows the tropes, better than you and I do, I bet—makes her living off of the best of them. She's not the enemy. I don't *think*. And anyway, this isn't a horror movie, it's reality TV. Which is so, so much scarier, Lu.

Maggie's suite, with its sitting area and dinette table, and the giant white board propped against the wall, is just through motel reception and to the right. I'm not sure why the Devil Hunters need a private escort to a room that's maybe twenty feet from where we stand. But I guess when you're the big boss, you can't just have the talent traipsing in and out of your office unaccompanied.

Maggie doesn't seem that big on ceremony thus far, but

maybe it's different if you're family. Even if you're semi-estranged family who've gone seventeen years without any contact.

I rise and nod, slightly nervous but trying to cover, at the Hunters. "I'll take you," I say, mostly in Ponytail's direction. "Follow me."

As I look at Ponytail, I stumble so my hip jostles the corner of a magazine rack. The crumpled, faded pamphlets detailing DINING HIGHLIGHTS OF OCEAN GROVE! (of which, presumably, there are myriad) go flying.

Tomorrow I'll have a weird-shaped bruise on my too-pale skin. I wonder, fleetingly, how any one person could possibly be so incapable of normal human interaction. The look that Blue Hair gives me suggests that she is wondering the very same thing.

But Lu, please don't tell me to *take it easy*, because you know I never do.

I crack the door from reception to the outer breezeway and muster as much dignity as I can (it's not much). When I step outside, onto the pavement, they do follow, so at least that's something.

THE AIR OUTSIDE THE motel is only slightly less suffocating. Though oddly the cigarette smell is stronger. I concentrate on the worn laces of my sneakers. They're not going to be great for off-road running, when we get to the Barrens later. But they're my oldest, most favorite pair of running shoes, *lucky* shoes, you might say, and that has to count for something. Comfort, familiarity—they're important. A girl can only take so much transition at one time, you know?

(Of course you know. You're the one who thought this trip

would be good for me, just the right *kind* of transition, after the past few months.)

“So, you’re a PA? You don’t seem like someone who’d be *into* this show,” Blue Hair observes, making it sound very definitively like an insult. I don’t even know what someone who’d be *into Fantastic, Fearsome* would be like, Lu, except I guess maybe there’s a presumption of hair dye involved.

“I like horror,” I tell her, “movies. *Stories*,” even though that’s: 1) an acute understatement, and 2) our dirty little secret, Lu. Yours and mine, kind of our *thing*. The campier, the better. Call it escapism.

“*Stories*.” Blue Hair’s word comes out in a hiss. “But you don’t, like, *believe* in ghosts.” She makes it sound like a veiled threat. Maybe it is. I guess a self-identified Devil Hunter would see it that way, anyway.

“The truth is out there.”

This is from the littlest one, the puffy-haired boy with watery eyes and no chin to speak of. He shrugs and turns pink, like he can’t believe he actually spoke out loud, and I want to cringe for him because for a moment he seems very worried about how Blue Hair will react to his outburst. *There, there*, I think. *If she’s that “punk rock,” she’s surely overcompensating for something.*

I deflect. “You’re a believer. But you get paid to do the series, right?” It comes out a touch more aggressively than intended.

She bristles. “We’re very committed to our science,” she says, matching my tone. “We believe in the Jersey Devil, and the rich paranormal history of the Garden State.”

“Right. But still. You *do* get paid. Right?”

They do. I’ve faxed, copied, and emailed the budget reports myself. The show pays for the on-air “experts,” not that this girl could possibly be a legitimate expert in anything

other than Being the Worst. I don't even know what I'm trying to prove by pushing the point.

Ponytail laughs, then covers his mouth like he's surprised by his own reaction. He doesn't look up when Blue Hair and I both whirl toward him in perfect synchronicity.

The door to Maggie's suite swings open.

"Is that the Devil Hunters, Winnie?" Maggie's voice is low and smoky, commanding and disembodied, like Dorothy's Wizard, ensconced firmly behind his curtain.

"It is," I reply. I'm embarrassed by the catch in my voice, a high-pitched squeak so unlike Maggie's sultry tenor. Did my mother have a voice like Maggie's, or like mine? Suddenly, I can't remember. I guess the little details are the easiest to lose hold of.

"Well, send them in," she continues as though I'd actually need to issue a separate directive to them. Like they aren't standing right exactly next to me. "I want to have a look at them." She makes it sound as though they aren't people at all, but artifacts, non-sentient beings. Lab rats. *Talent.*

Blue Hair shoves past me. It doesn't bother me as much as I think she wants it to, though it *does* bother me a little, if we're going to be perfectly honest here, Lu. And then the other guy goes in behind her, and then it's just Ponytail and me, not-looking at each other in the most active, most intense way two people can *not-do* anything. For a moment I think he's going to say something to me, but then there's a shout—"Seth!" from inside the trailer, and I guess Seth is him, that's who he is, and in he goes, to "wardrobe."

And suddenly, I can't remember what those people wore in that movie. The one we watched that time.

How is a ghost hunter *supposed* to dress, Lu?

Fantastic, Fearsome: NJ application form

**Please include two recent COLOR photos, one head shot and one full body, along with your application form and a short video (up to three minutes) explaining why you're interested in our show.*

Name:

Age:

Occupation:

Please give us a short bio about yourself. Include talents, hobbies, skills, etc.

I'm originally from Wayne, NJ, finishing up my freshman year at Montclair State University, so I'm a true "Jersey Girl." Next year I have to declare my major and I want to design my own course in paranormal studies. Being on "Fantastic, Fearsome" should help convince the anthro department to let me!

Actually, I'm a little bit psychic and I take everything about the paranormal, occult, etc., very seriously. Maggie Leader is basically my hero. She's such a role model. Last semester I led a pagan chanting circle, and some of those girls said I reminded them of Maggie. So many of the occult "experts" you guys get are such clichés (no offense). I mean those kooky white-haired fortune-teller-y mediums all blend together after a while if you watch the show as much as I do. It would be cool to have young, cute talent for this season. And the other two Hunters I work with, of course. Seth and Ivan (fun fact: I used to tutor him when I was in high school and he was in junior high. Now he's a Hunter. I guess I just have that kind of influence on people).

My talents: I'm very outspoken. When I'm in a group, like with the Devil Hunters, I always end up being the one in charge. My mom calls it a "strong personality." It isn't for everyone, but that's the way I like it! Besides, unlike the others, I can sense when a place has any paranormal energy going on, even without all the gear and the instruments.

I know I would really add another layer to your show.

If you asked the guys, they'd probably say I'm like the mother hen of our group, like the glue. Seth is probably the most serious of us, but I'm the most organized. I keep us proactive about our mission. We ARE going to find the Jersey Devil! So why not let us find it for you?

Also I write poetry. I was thinking I could post it, maybe on the show's Tumblr or something. It's really intense and private, but I think it's good to show viewers my spiritual side. So they see what it's like, being so tuned in to the supernatural.

Everyone thinks it would be so much fun to be psychic, like it's all reading minds or guessing lottery numbers. But really, it's a total mixed blessing. Viewers should know the truth. It can be really overwhelming. It's just . . . it's hard, being a Hunter. And it can be lonely, too. People don't really "get" us, or what we're doing. So that's hard.

But it's really important, too. We're doing really important work.

Shattered Glass

Your eye

A mirror held to the world,

Reflecting wholeness

A seamless tapestry by Minerva's
steady hand,

A picture to be framed and hung,
Complete.

But mine,

Shattered by the blow of Turenn's fury,

A tray of jagged shards,

Reflects at all angles the light of before
and beyond,

A film shot out of sequence but somehow
truer for its

Brokenness - CM Whitter mxxiv



Possible sighting?
Tracy 973 4-2034

"Ocean is more ancient than
the mountains, and freighted
with the memories and
dreams of time"

- HP Lovecraft

Seth-veggie lomain
Ivan-winton sp, egg roll,
gem travar chix, dr pepper-coke if no dr



AUDITION TAPE—SETH JARVIS—FANTASTIC, FEARSOME NJ:

SETH:

Okay, um, hi. Is this on?

Fuzzy HAND comes close into the frame, camera TILTS, then steadies. PULL BACK to REVEAL **SETH**, early twenties, shaggy brown ponytail and kind hazel eyes. His audition clip is being filmed on his home computer, clearly set up in his CHILDHOOD BEDROOM. An AUTOGRAPHED COPY of the original movie poster for *Blade Runner* is visible just behind his head, and his T-shirt shows a reproduction of the Grady twins from Kubrik's *The Shining*.

SETH

Okay. Yeah. Sorry about that. This is . . . weird. I'm not a camera guy. Or a computer guy. Not really a tech guy at all. That's Ivan's thing. Kid's still in high school, it's amazing, he takes the whole ghost-hunting thing more seriously than—well, maybe more seriously than Maggie Leader, actually. Just barely.

(beat)

Sorry if that sounded, I don't know, obnoxious. So, like I'm sure she said on her application, it was Casey's idea to try out for this show. I,

uh, don't really love the spotlight, you know?
I'm the kind of person who mostly sticks to
small groups of people I already know.

(flushes, laughs)

But when we—The Hunters, I mean—when we heard
you guys were coming to Jersey, that you were
looking for the Devil, we just . . . Well, that
was it. I mean, we had to do it. I can get used
to the cameras, you know, if you like us. If you
want us. Because we're going to find the Devil.
That's not even a question.

(pauses, straightens)

SETH:

I guess you could say my family has a long
history of being, um . . . interested in the
occult. And especially the Jersey Devil. We're
from Jersey, for, like, generations now, and
my father is obsessed with all the folklore. I
mean, you should see his library.

(blinks, swallows)

And my mom is . . . not around, these days.

(recovering)

So, you know, what family there is, I have their
support with all of this. And it would be cool

to get school credit. Casey said she's trying to get a "paranormal studies" major approved at Montclair. But really . . . We're pretty expert, the group. Found each other through a New Jersey Devils meet-up last spring and we've been on the hunt ever since.

(deep breath)

And you know, don't be fooled by Ivan, just because he's still in high school. I feel like . . . there's a chance he might've joined up with us because he's got a little thing for Casey, or he used to. But he's in it now. And I think Casey's right about getting younger people on the show. We could open up a whole new demographic for you. And Ivan's kind of a genius. Like the Jason Bourne of the paranormal investigators world. Or Doogie Howser. You know, that old show with the young doctor from before he was Barney? Or Doctor Horrible.

(shakes his head and smiles)

Sorry, geek moment. But, anyway. Devil Hunters.
Yeah. You should cast us. Seriously.
We could rock that for you.

The FUZZY, OUT-OF-FOCUS ARM comes back in on a CLOSE-UP. There is a CLICKING SOUND, and the screen FADES TO GRAY.

TWO



But—wait, Lucia. Let's back up for a minute, here. We're walking into this program *in media res*. And as with any great tragicomic melodrama, there's a juicy backstory looming just below the surface, waiting to be peeled back, to be worked into the plot. So let's lay the groundwork now, if you will.

You will, Lu, right? Of course. You always do. That's why we're friends, you and I.

Let's start with a game. An "oldie but a goodie," carried over from the car rides of our early childhood. We loved this one. Remember?

I Spy. Our favorite.

Not a game you can play with only one person, I know. But you're not here—you have a bike tour of the Pacific Coast Highway, while I have a family-tragedy-turned-last-minute internship in television—in *reality television!*—smack-dab dead center in America's armpit. You're here inside my head, inside my thoughts, Lucia. You know me well enough that you can probably predict those thoughts before they even form.

It's you and me in my brain right now, Lu. So, all right, then:

I spy with my little eye . . . something . . .

Broken.

Yeah. Something broken. Something battered, deflated, defeated. Something sad.

Asbury Park.

You're shaking your head with disapproval. "*Winnie Flynn. That is certainly a glass-half-empty sort of view of things.*"

You use my full name when you're being judgmental. I usually let it go because, usually, it's funny. Well, fine. Maybe so. But it's this place, not me. Never mind the horrible aching sadness of the last three months; this is not about me. This is I Spy, and I can't help the bleak view from the motel parking lot. I don't make up the rules here. I'm not the boss of any of this. If I were, I'd still be in Portland, with you. If I were, Mom would still be alive.

But I'm not. And she's not.

I spy a vista collapsing in upon itself, cloudy streaks of gray and choking loneliness: a dusty, abandoned soundstage. I spy a swollen, murky shoreline that makes me want to curl my knees into my chest and tuck my forehead down. I spy despair, decay. Gloom. Doom.

"Is it possible you're being dramatic, Winnie?"

Well, yes. Anything is possible, Lu. It's only the beach. Or, "the Shore," as they say down here.

But hey, I'm just calling it like I see it.

Besides, Lu, it's barely been three months since my mother killed herself.

Her death—her *suicide*—it's fresh. And it leaves an impression. Even though Dad swears it had nothing to do with me, with us. How can he know? I mean, how can he *really*,

for-real-for-sure, *know?* He can't. No one can. If we knew anything, we would have seen this coming. We could have stopped it. We could have helped her. We *would* have.

At the funeral, you were standing next to me when Aunt Maggie appeared through the Oregon mist, floating across the cemetery path like some kind of tanned, tooth-veneered Angel of Mercy, Hollywood-style. *Mom's* eyes were peering out of this stranger's face. She was going back to her home state, *Mom's* home state. Back, to film *Fantastic, Fearsome: New Jersey*. She'd rented a chain of motel rooms, *these* rooms, a block from the salt-logged boardwalk down in Asbury Park. She was going to film all through July, all around the state.

She wanted me to come. She wanted us, finally, to get to know each other.

Dad wanted me to go, too.

We had a little disagreement, as you may recall. I wasn't sure about his judgment; he was grief-crazed, after all. But *you* agreed with him. You thought I needed a change of scenery, a distraction. And anyway, he was going to spend all summer on that journal piece he's been angsting over, burying himself in work like he always does when real life gets too icky. The Absent-Minded Professor. He's straight from central casting, himself.

Besides, real life *did* get too icky. Not just for him. For me.

So yes, it was necessary: leaving Portland, leaving home, leaving all the familiarities. Like her bathrobe. The blue flannel with the ugly floral print. It's still hanging on the hook inside her closet door. It still smells—faintly—like her face lotion. Ginger and citrus.

Or, it still did the day I left, anyway.

Part of me couldn't imagine being all by myself this summer. Couldn't imagine that being with Maggie wouldn't

just dredge up a litany of *new* painful questions about Mom. But you get used to it. (That was the grief counselor's theory. You get used to almost anything. He wore a very shiny watch, the counselor, so I have to assume he was good at his job. Shiny watches have a reassuring quality.) And that means that I'll get used to Asbury Park and this motel's particular odor: a queasy mix of sea air, motor oil, and something like old tuna salad.

I can only expect I'll get used to Aunt Maggie, too.

No, she didn't explain why she and Mom had fallen out of touch. Bygones were better off bygone. But Life Is Too Short, she realized (the cliché her exact words, sounding as if they were all capitalized), and she wanted to Be There for Me Now, and maybe I needed a Change of Pace, In Light of Everything? Dad was easy to convince, even without your help. Maggie's show—her whole empire—is so well known, after all. She's famous, allegedly stable . . . ergo: not a kidnapping psychopath. Family Is Important, you *should* Get Back to Your Roots, yada yada, blah blah blah. You guys were on the same page.

I brought the journal you gave me this past birthday with me, because, as you say, "the Internet isn't *real*, Winn." I'm the only one who knows you well enough to know that your story isn't bullshit: You don't even have an email address. *No email?* People like that don't exist, right? Except in the case of my best friend. And anyway, even if you won't see these pages, at least, if I keep writing, I won't be completely alone. At least then, I won't be playing I Spy entirely on my own. Even when I'm the only one here.

Maybe by the end of the summer it will be a sort of scrapbook of this experience.

Maybe I'll even show it to you. You being the only one

who's ever known the real, true truth of me. Maybe by then you'll have joined Gmail, if only to get into college.

Have I mentioned you're a good best friend, Lucia? If you were here, that's what I'd tell you. But you're not, so instead, I'm writing it down.

Instead, it's I Spy all by my lonesome. Only my personal demons to keep me company. A closet full of skeletons.

"Winnie." You wag a finger. "*That's not what you're here for.*"

And you're right, really. Right now, it's about the fantastic. The fearsome. The haunted, haunting myths and mysteries of what could, in truth, be thought of as my once-upon-a-homeland. My *motherland*, oh, ha-ha, no pun intended, of course.

Aunt Maggie makes her living trading on strange tales. I'm just her unlikely protégé for the next few weeks. Right now, my own skeletons have nothing to do with the story.

Right now, I'm just here for the ghosts.

You and I, duh—of course we knew *Fantastic, Fearsome*, had even caught a few episodes online at your place, where Mom wasn't around to make her I'm-totally-not-disapproving disapproving face. But we didn't know New Jersey, even though Mom and Maggie grew up here. Step one in Embracing My Legacy (my legacy! Which somehow includes *Fantastic: Fearsome!*), you said, was reading up on my history.

And Asbury Park has some history.

A HUNDRED-PLUS YEARS AGO, this place was a destination. Palace Amusements was building up piece by piece, starting with a candy-swirled colorful carousel; tourists flocked majestic hotels overlooking the ocean. Bruce Springsteen grew up around here. A whole bunch of his songs are basically about this place. *Greetings from Asbury Park, NJ*, is one of

those iconic, pop-culture touchstones that locals like to wave in your face like a bright flag of victory.

Pride is so weird.

Of course, lately, whatever interest in the Jersey Shore lingers has gravitated south, toward Seaside—where beefy, orange-skinned aliens sell screen-printed T-shirts to the greasy-haired, hungover masses. Aunt Maggie’s not the first TV producer to take an interest in Jersey. Obviously. But she’s got the vibe down. Self-tanning. Gym memberships. Hot tubs fetid as a petri dish. So-called “reality,” constructed from cheap Swedish furnishings, recycled tabloid rumors, and silicone wheeled into the jaundiced spotlight like a shiny sideshow attraction. *Shudder.*

But we were talking about history.

When the SS *Morro Castle* crashed against the coastline here in 1934, it coincided with the Great Depression. Locally, it ushered in an aura of malaise and overall *meh* that I’m not sure was ever totally shaken off.

“Winnie.” A note of warning creeps into your tone. “No. Don’t.”

Because you know me too well, Lu. You know what leap of linguistics and logic my brain is going to take at the mention of the word . . .

Depression.

There’s that ache again. Old Reliable. At least Asbury Park looks the way the inside of my brain feels. In movie terms that’s called *pathetic fallacy*, I think. But Lu, it’s crushing, this feeling of *sad* knotted around me, draped like one of those lead X-ray dentist’s bibs, weighing me down. You’re one of the only people I trust with that truth. You’re one of the few who knows how hard I struggle to be solid, to be stony and contained. While inside, every thought, every feeling, all of

those tiny shattered pieces are jagged and sharp and amplified, bubbling in the back of my throat like tar.

And if Aunt Maggie has her way, it's going to get "fear-some" here over the course of the next few weeks. Don't say you weren't warned.

On the other hand, it's going to be fantastic, too.

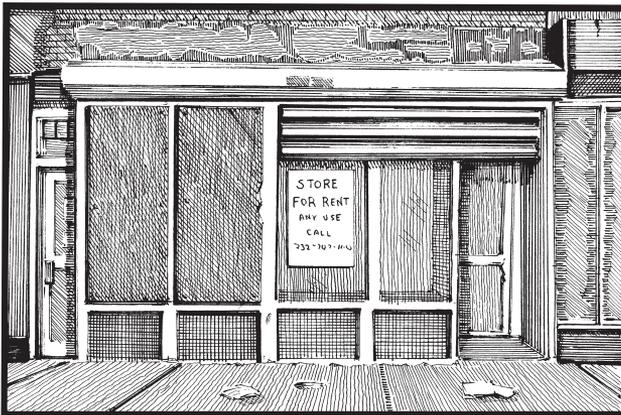
Or so I'm told.

FADE IN

EXT. ASBURY PARK BOARDWALK—DAY

WIDE SHOT

CAMERA PANS across the bleak, gray landscape. We linger on bits of fast-food litter, scrawled graffiti, places in the boardwalk that are splintered and rotting.



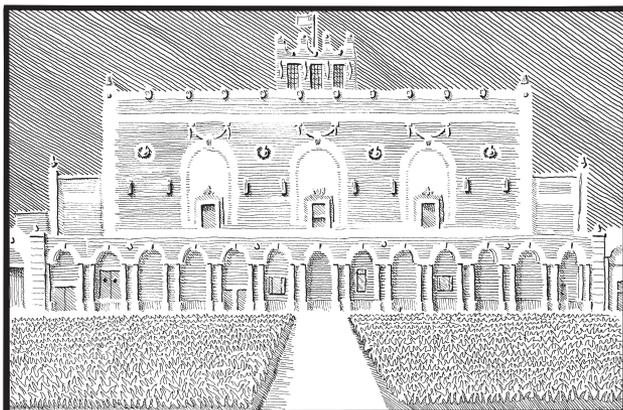
CLOSE-UP on various "for rent" signs displayed prominently in ocean-facing shop windows, iron grates long rusted. Everything conveys hopelessness, surrender.

HOST/MAGGIE (VOICE OVER):

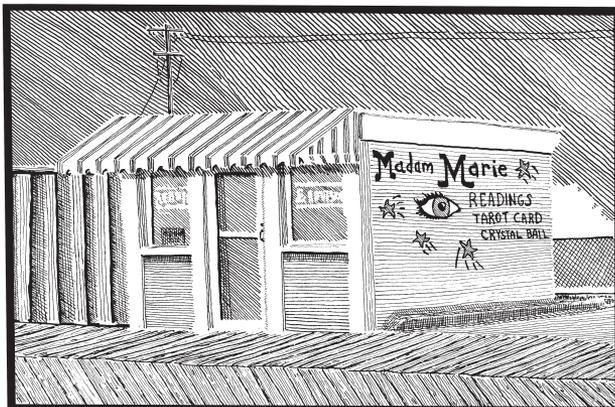
Asbury Park. The name alone conjures images of a long-ago era in New Jersey's pop cultural history.

FLASH CUTS:

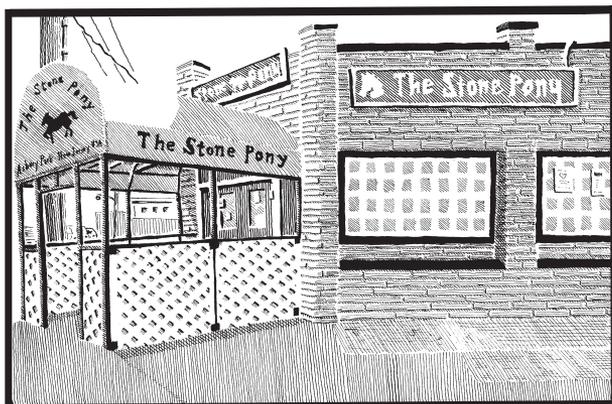
Convention Hall



Madam Marie's Fortunes

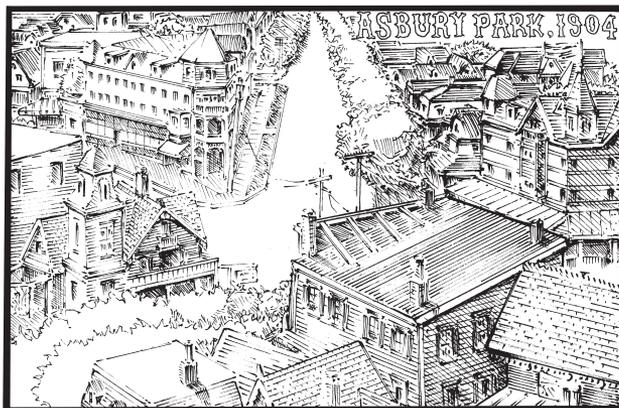


The Stone Pony



CLOSE-UP:

Vintage aerial view of landscape



MAGGIE (CONT'D):

Beginning with the infamous *Morro Castle* shipwreck of 1934, the "City by the Sea" has known its fair share of disasters—

(beat)

Both natural and unnatural alike.

(more upbeat, perky)

Now, join *Fearsome, Fantastic New Jersey* as we peer into the haunting history of the Garden State's most notorious piers. And remember, viewers, as we always say—

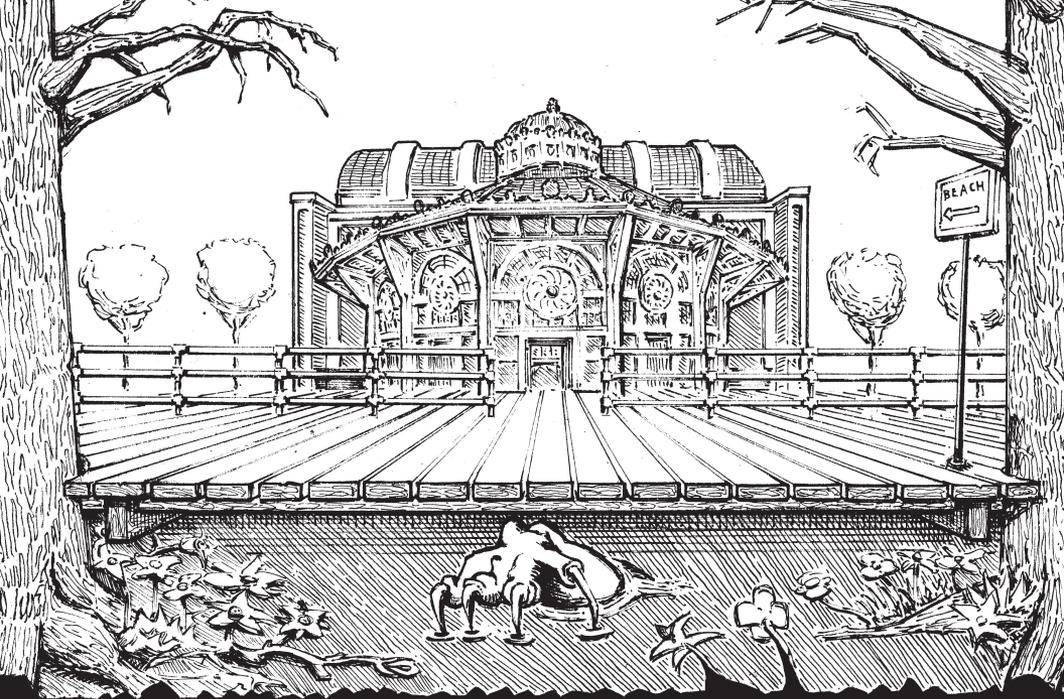
(beat—ominous again)

There's nothing to fear . . . but the *fantastic!*

Opening credits sequence.

CUT TO:

FADE OUT



In the Garden State
the most fearsome flowers grow in the shade...

FANTASTIC FEARSOME

new jersey

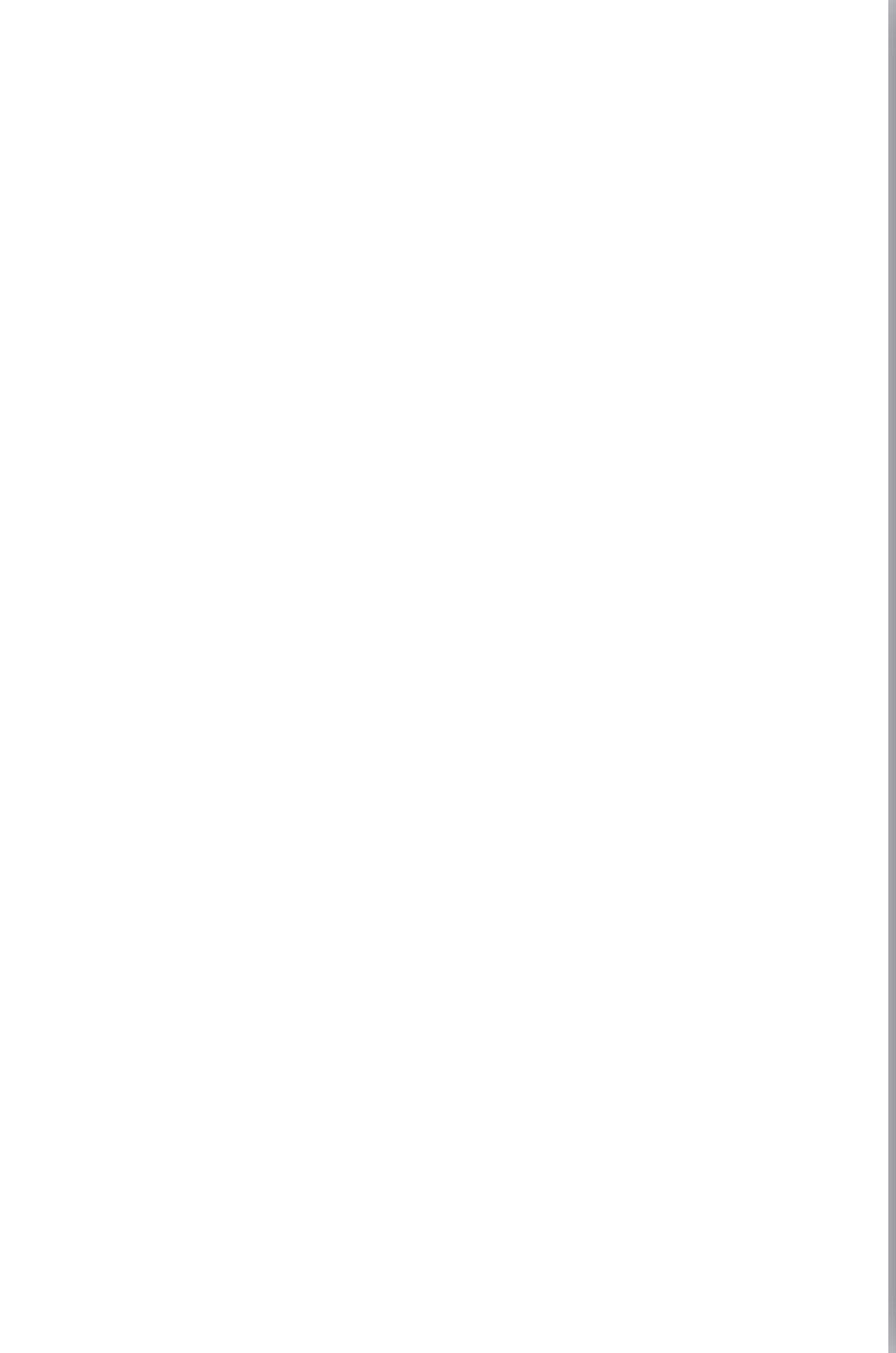
Wednesdays 10/9C

After So You Think You Can Commune With The Dead

ParaNormal Channel

MILES FROM NORMAL

www.fantasticfearsome.com



THREE



“It’s not going to work.”

Morning. The motor oil/tuna smell is especially strong today.

It’s so humid my hair hangs in wet clumps, even though it’s been over an hour since I showered. The sun is a blurry blaze through the streaked picture window, and the AC coughs in a way that doesn’t inspire confidence.

I woke at six. Our call time wasn’t until eight, but a pack of rabid seagulls decided to engage in passionate debate outside my room—until a supersized garbage truck choked its way into the parking lot. New Jersey has supersized garbage, I guess. But by then I was halfway into my running shorts and out the door for a quick two or three miler.

It’s been a long day, Lu. And I haven’t even had breakfast yet.

“It will be fine, sweet pea,” Maggie says. Her raspy voice is extra sultry right now, all honey and gravel at this hour.

“It’s too tight.”

That’s Jane, hunched over the long plastic folding table

we set up in Maggie's suite. I say *we*, meaning Amanda and me. Yesterday, Amanda—the other PA, I told you about her, with the blonde hair, and those expensive-looking cropped jeans that were cuffed *just so*—and I were dispatched to Costco in search of the various furnishings required to set up a temporary office.

Can you picture the Jersey Costco, Lu? Our cashier had plastic glitter starfish dangling from her ears. It was amazing. I will have to bring a pair back for you as a souvenir.

Now the table is smothered in scripts and Sharpies and battered coffee mugs, with binder-clip sculptures and crumpled, lip gloss-stained napkins. Maybe thirteen minutes, max, since we set it up; but it already looks like the crew has been here for weeks. They are an efficient bunch. I start to wonder if I'll get in the way. Jane and Maggie huddle over the day's shot list, bickering like old neighbors before we head to the Asbury Park Paranormal Odditorium.

The *Asbury Park Paranormal Odditorium*, Lucia. Squeal with me, now. How did we *not* know this place existed? Tragic circumstances notwithstanding, there are way worse places to spend an afternoon.

Jane frowns. "It's too tight, Meg," she says again. *Meg*. That's how you know they're practically sisters, that they've been working together basically since their respective embryonic states. "We have too much to shoot at the museum." She ticks off the list on her hand. "The tour, the interview, the séance . . ."

"We'll split the cameras. Hillary will go with you to the museum; Russ will come with me to take care of pickup. I want to have more than enough." Maggie pauses. "I'm sure you think that's excessive."

"*More than enough* is inherently excessive. *More. Than*. It literally means, 'an excessive amount.' It conflicts with our

schedule.” Jane jabs a finger at the shot list for emphasis. “Which is tight.”

“Our schedule is padded, jelly bean—thanks to *your* genius planning skills. I don’t give you nearly enough credit, Janie.” Maggie’s voice is very measured now, overly sweet. She picks up a mug that’s been resting at her elbow, sips, and makes a sour face.

From the corner of the room, Amanda leaps to pluck the cup from her. I watch as she rinses it and refills it from our tiny machine (“—black, two Splendas, never stevia because it has that aftertaste, you know what I mean, lovely—”) without missing a beat.

Amanda’s jeans are cuffed again today. She seems nice enough, and I have to admire her ability to read my aunt, but I think she’s one of Those Girls. (She has *bangs*, Lu. Perky cuffed jeans and bangs. The sartorial intersection of too-much-time-on-your-hands and trying-too-hard. I’m wearing nylon running shorts. Mostly I was just proud of myself that they were clean-ish.)

Maggie, fortified by her fresh cup of coffee, flicks a hand in the general direction of Amanda and me. “Hillary will go in the van. Russ and I will go in my car. You girls will take the SUV to get the food.”

Amanda whips out her iPhone. She furtively taps a new note: COSTCO—FRUIT PLATTER?

It occurs to me: What if she *stitches* those cuffs in place?

Jane looks doubtful. “You need *lead* camera for pickup?”

“Russ has an eye for the extraneous,” Maggie says. “He goes rogue, freestyle. We get great material. Hillary only needs to do the formal segments. She’s seen the show. She’s worked on her own. She knows what we need. It’s paint by numbers. Buttercup, it’s *fine*.”

From outside, I hear a short, low rumble, like a momentary roll of thunder. I lean to Amanda.

“Is it supposed to . . . to . . .” There’s a tickle in my throat and I cough right into Amanda’s ear. It’s not graceful. “Sorry. Rain?” Humiliation washes over me. Those Girls do not cough in other people’s ears.

“I don’t think so,” she stage-whispers, gracious enough, but edging way from me.

Jane sighs. “You make a compelling argument, Meg.” She rises, shuffling some papers together and tucking them under her arm. “Fine. I guess we’ll make it work.”

“Yes, cookie,” Maggie says, and I marvel at her limitless array of sweets-related endearments. She’s making me hungry. “That’s just what I’m thinking.”

She peeks up, looks directly at me, and locks in.

Mom’s eyes.

“Are you okay, Winnie?”

I clear my throat. Mostly I’m relieved she calls me Winnie and not, I don’t know, cinnamon twist or donut butt because frankly, either of those seem like real possibilities, Lu, and I’m just not ready. She couldn’t possibly know that Mom always called me lemon drop. She couldn’t possibly know that.

“I’m fine,” I say.

(I’m not fine. *Mom’s eyes. Lemon drop.*)

She winks at me. “Great,” she says. “And when you’re shopping, don’t forget to pick up more—”

“—Splenda,” Amanda cuts in, iPhone back out, tapping furiously.

“Exactly, *pumpkin.*”

Maggie disappears into her bedroom. Jane slides her prescription sunglasses down her nose. I glance at my watch.

“We’re supposed to be at the museum in forty minutes. Is there going to be time for the food?”

Amanda smiles, her teeth a row of gleaming pearls.

“No, you don’t get it, Winnie.” Her tone is not unkind. *Understatement of the summer.* I’m silent. I couldn’t even begin to explain. She sort-of shoulders against me in a slight, on-purpose, friendly way. “We’re the PAs, Winnie.”

“That part, I know.”

“What I’m saying is—whatever the crew needs, we *make* the time.” She grabs my wrist. “Just come. I’ll show you.”

And I go with her, I go along, because it’s my job and because . . . I mean, she’s saying she’ll show me, and you know, *someone* has to.

“You’ve got jeans, right?”

I follow her gaze to my shorts. The clean ones. The only things I could imagine wearing, in this cotton-candy-sticky humidity. “I have jeans. In my room.”

“Change,” she says. “I know it’s gross out. But you’re going to want pockets.”

Pockets. Sensible. Maybe she gets a temporary pass on the cuffs.

“Trust me,” she says. And I know you’d tell me that I should, but it won’t surprise you that I can’t, not really. Not just yet.

AMANDA’S BEHIND THE WHEEL of the SUV. While I *can* drive, I haven’t had my license for very long, and seriously, just even getting up into the SUV involved a Herculean *step-hop-leap-launch* kind of move that accentuated what you lovingly call my “diesel quads.” (And while we’re on the subject, Lu? *Diesel:* not a compliment. Not to me, anyway.)

“My mother touched the Jersey Devil, you know?”

She says this casually, the way you'd tell someone that you were thinking of, oh, I don't know, maybe having pizza for lunch.

My mother touched the Jersey Devil.

And suddenly, those cuffed pants seem less like a deliberate (if misguided) stylistic tic and more like evidence of a repressed psychopath. As you and I *well know*, Lu, the whole point—the whole *fun*, I mean—of all of that paranormal ghost-y woo-woo stuff, is that it's completely and totally *fake*.

I was hoping we'd all be in on this same joke.

Amanda throws me a side-eye, waiting. We turn a corner. The garbage bag-sized quantity of bagels we've procured collapses across the backseat like a giant, lumpy slug.

"I . . . oh." I have no idea how to respond. *How interesting, I think you might be insane? Or, and does your mother hear voices, too? Or I could go the jokey route. Was it a good touch or a bad touch? Fingers crossed she's not carrying Rosemary's baby, ha-ha!*

It doesn't matter. I've waited too long and she's off again.

"I know, I know," Amanda says. "You must have, like, tons of those kinds of stories yourself. I mean, growing up with Maggie for an aunt, and stuff. Obviously, I don't have, like, a *legacy* the way *you* do." Her voice is earnest. She turns to me. This causes the car to swerve and me to flinch.

I nod toward the windshield and try to communicate *eyes on the road* without actually saying as much.

"Sorry," she continues, cutting the wheel. We straighten so quickly my neck snaps back. "Sorry. Again. Jeez." She glances at the GPS and flips her long blonde ponytail over one shoulder. "So, yeah. I mean, I don't have a legacy or, um, my own experience with the paranormal. But my mother, she was an aspiring actress. She did a few B movies, slashers, I mean, really low-rent stuff, back when *she* was in college. And

in the end she gave up acting, and the funny thing is, she used to say she never believed in the supernatural, ever, *especially* from being on-set and seeing, you know—”

“—how the sausage is made,” I cut in. Because what she’s saying, it makes total sense to me and I just can’t help myself.

“Right, exactly!” We swerve again. A passing blue sedan honks at us. Amanda makes a rude gesture out the window. “So she didn’t believe in it, you know. And then one summer, after she was married but before my brother was born—my older brother, Thad, he’s, um, a lawyer now—that one summer, she went camping with my dad in the Barrens.”

She starts to turn toward me and I panic, reach out, and grab the steering wheel. She rolls her eyes, but we both smile a little. I let go, shaky.

“I know you’re not from here, but you know the Barrens?” she asks.

The Pine Barrens. “I know Wikipedia says it’s where the Jersey Devil was born?” My voice turns up, making it a question.

“Yeah. And that’s where he’s still, um, sighted sometimes. The Jersey Devil. By, like, people.”

“People like your mother.” I try to keep my voice from catching on the word. *Mother.* Amanda doesn’t notice.

“Right. She was—well, honestly?” She pauses, hesitant, then giggles. “She was *peeing*, late at night, how embarrassing is *that*? She’d snuck out of the tent and gone off by herself. And the way she tells it, she was just, uh, getting herself back together when she felt a scratchy, you know, hand—like a paw, really—on the back of her neck.”

“The Devil.” I wouldn’t have thought that the Devil had paws. Would you, Lu?

“Right!” She’s excited, as if I guessed this from context and not from her actual words. As if I’m a true believer. “So,

anyway, she likes to say that there's never been a really good movie about the Jersey Devil."

"*The Last Broadcast?*"

Amanda raises an eyebrow, surprised in a good way that I've heard of it. Yes, I'm a little bit proud of myself for making her eyebrow fly up like that.

"Well, okay, yeah, *seminal*. But still. There's room for a story that focuses more on the creature itself. In my opinion. He's—it's—I mean, it's a big deal. Phenomenal Week? January sixteenth through the twenty-third, 1903, the Devil was sighted *daily* in New Jersey."

She means this, Lu. I can hear in her voice how much she means this. She used the word "seminal" in conversation. But people see Sasquatch daily, too. Don't they? I hold my tongue.

"So now I'm at UCLA, studying communications. Not exactly what my mom was doing, back when she was doing anything. Not the same as being in front of the camera, I know. But still, film. And so, getting this internship! It's amazing."

All of her scattered little phrases, her strung-together-like-Christmas-lights sentence fragments, they connect to create a glow that explodes across her face. She beams. "I swear, it's like the only time in my whole life that something I'm doing is more exciting to my parents—my mom, anyway—than my stupid lawyer brother."

(You're thinking, *she sure does hate lawyers*, and I'm sorry about that. I'm sure if she met your dad she'd feel differently, Lu.)

"Wow," I say.

"I know, I *know*," she insists. "To you, this is nothing."

"I didn't grow up with Maggie," I say, almost apologetic.

“She and my mom, they . . . I’m not sure, actually,” I admit. “I guess they grew apart at some point.” *I guess.*

“Huh,” Amanda says.

Relief washes over me as she slows to a stop. We’ve arrived at the back end of a small parking lot. The van is here, cords snaking from its open rear doors, crates and boxes and overstuffed plastic bins scattered across the asphalt like an obstacle course. None of the crew is in sight. Maggie’s car isn’t here yet. Does that mean she’s still shooting pickup? And if so, does *that* mean Jane was right when she complained that the timing was too tight? I know I’m new to this, but it’s very hard to believe that anything of substance will get done without Maggie around. That’s just the effect she has, what she *projects*.

Amanda kills the ignition. “So if she’s not into the paranormal stuff, like Maggie, what does your mom do? What’s she like?”

The question hangs between us as the engine gives a final cough.

“She’s . . .” The air is thick, pressing against my chest. “She . . .” *Just say it. Just say it.* The words tumble out. “She’s dead.”

Amanda’s face crumples into fifteen different expressions at the same time.

I feel like I’m drowning, Lu, but at least it’s out there. At least I won’t have to say that particular string of horrible words to Amanda ever again. But this silence is just too much. I scramble to open the passenger-side door, and I can’t even say anything else, can’t explain or apologize, because all of my other words were devoured by that one intractable, impossible truth.

And then, mercifully, I’m out of the car.

We’ve got work to do, Lu.